



## David Guzik :: Study Guide for Philippians 2

---

### HUMBLE LIVING IN LIGHT OF JESUS' HUMBLE EXAMPLE

A. How Paul wants the Philippians to live with each other.

1. (Phl 2:1) The basis of Paul's exhortation to the Philippians.

Therefore if *there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy,*

a. **Therefore:** This draws back to what Paul has built on in [Philippians 1:27-30](#), telling the Philippians how to stand strong for the Lord against *external* conflicts. Now he tells them how to act against *internal* conflicts in the body of Christ.

b. **If there is any:** This introduces the *basis* for Paul's exhortation to unity, humility and love among believers. The idea is that if the Philippian Christians have received the things he mentions, then they have a responsibility to do what he is about to describe.

i. "It is extremely difficult to give the force of these expressions; they contain a torrent of most affecting eloquence; the apostle pouring out his whole heart to a people whom with all his heart he loved, and who were worthy of the love even of an apostle." (Clarke)

c. **If there is any consolation in Christ:** Paul asked this as a rhetorical question, knowing of course that there was great **consolation in Christ**. Every Christian should know the **consolation of Christ**.

i. [Luke 2:25](#) says that one of the titles for Jesus as the Messiah is *the Consolation of Israel*. Paul could say in [2 Corinthians 1:5](#), *For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ*. In [2 Thessalonians 2:16](#), Paul says that *God has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace*. Of course there is **consolation in Christ!**

ii. "The Holy Spirit consoles, but Christ *is the consolation*. If I may use the figure, the Holy Spirit is the Physician, but Christ is the medicine." (Spurgeon)

d. **If there is any ... comfort of love:** This is Paul's second rhetorical question in this passage, affirming the great **comfort of love**. Every Christian should know what it is to have Jesus give them the **comfort of love**.

i. [2 Corinthians 1:3](#) says that God is the *God of all comfort*. There is no way He cannot comfort us and no circumstance beyond His comfort. But this is more than comfort; this is the **comfort of love**.

ii. The word **comfort** in this passage is the ancient Greek word *paraklesis*. The idea behind this word for **comfort** in the New Testament is always more than soothing sympathy. It has the idea of strengthening, of helping, of making strong. The idea behind this word is communicated by the Latin word for **comfort** (*fortis*), which also means "brave." The love of God in our lives makes us strong and makes us brave. Of course there is **comfort of love!**

e. **If there is any ... fellowship of the Spirit:** This is Paul's third rhetorical question in this context. Paul knew and valued the **fellowship of the Spirit**, and every Christian should know what it is to have the **fellowship of the Spirit**.

i. **Fellowship** is the ancient Greek word *koinonia*. It means the sharing of things in common. We share life with the Spirit of God that we never knew before. The Holy Spirit fills and guides and moves in our lives in a powerful and precious way. Of course there is **fellowship of the Spirit!**

ii. "The Lord doth usually and graciously water the holy fellowship of his people with the dews of many sweet and glorious refreshings; so that they have a very heaven upon earth." (Trapp)

f. **If there is any ... affection and mercy:** Paul's final rhetorical question assumes that every Christian knows something of the **affection** of God and of the **mercy** of God.

i. Paul mentioned these things in a manner that suggests to us that they should all be obvious parts of the Christian's experience. To make his rhetorical point, he could have just as easily said, "If water is wet, if fire is hot, if rocks are hard" and so forth.

ii. Each of these gifts - **consolation in Christ, comfort of love, fellowship of the Spirit, affection and mercy** - are communicated to us both in a direct, spiritual way from Jesus, and from Jesus *through His people*. But there isn't any doubt that these are real gifts for Christians to really experience.

2. (Phl 2:2-4) The specifics of Paul's exhortation to the Philippians regarding love and humility among believers.

Fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, *being* of one accord, of one mind. *Let nothing be done* through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

a. **Fulfill my joy:** This speaks of a personal request. Part of the reason Paul wanted the Philippians to take heed to his word was because they should know that it would make the founding apostle of their church happy.

**b. By being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind:**

These together all speak of the same idea; a deep, abiding, internal unity among the Philippians.

- i. This unity is the goal. What follows in [Philippians 2:3-4](#) are descriptions of how to achieve and practice the unity mentioned here in [Philippians 2:2](#).

**c. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition:** This is the first step to this kind of unity. In the flesh, we are often motivated by **selfish ambition** or **conceit**. Much of what we do is not done out of love for others, but out of our own desire for "advancement" or "promotion" (**selfish ambition**).

- i. Paul found it important to say **selfish ambition**. Not all ambition is *selfish* ambition, and there is a *good ambition* to glorify God and serve Him with everything we have.

**d. Let nothing be done through ... conceit:** This is the second step to this kind of unity. **Conceit** is thinking too highly of one's self, of having an excessive self-interest and self-preoccupation. It could be more literally translated "empty glory."

- i. A dictionary definition of **conceit** is "An excessively favorable opinion of one's own ability, importance, wit," and so forth. When we do things feeling we are so important, or so able, or so talented, we are out of God's will. We are working against the unity Paul is pleading with them to have.

**e. In lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself:** This third step to the kind of unity described in [Philippians 2:2](#) is completely contradictory to the attitude of the world, because **lowliness of mind** is about the least attractive thing to the thinking of this world.

- i. The ancient Greeks considered **lowliness of mind** to be a fault, not a virtue. "The pagan and the secular idea of manhood is self-assertiveness, imposing one's will on others; when anyone stooped to others he did so only under compulsion, hence his action was ignominious [disgraceful]. The Christian ethical idea of humility could not be reached by the secular mind; it lacked the spiritual soil." (Lenski)
- ii. "In pagan writers generally, the word had a bad meaning, 'abject, grovelling.' But when it comes into the New Testament, its meaning is ennobled." (Wuest)
- iii. "The apostle knew that, to create concord, you need first to beget lowliness of mind. Men do not quarrel when their ambitions have come to an end." (Spurgeon)

**f. Esteem others better than himself:** This rebukes much of the culture's concept of self-esteem. The Bible knows nothing of the idea that we should - and must - carry with us an attitude of confident superiority in every situation, and knows nothing of the idea that this is the foundation for a healthy human personality.

i. While we recognize the intrinsic value of every human life, we can't deny that the low self-esteem of some is *justified*, and based in *reality*. When we are in rebellion against God, it is fitting for us to have a low self-esteem.

ii. As we **esteem others better**, we will naturally have a concern for their needs and concerns. This sort of *outward* looking mentality naturally leads to a unity among the people of God.

iii. If I consider you above me and you consider me above you, then a marvelous thing happens: we have a community where everyone is looked up to, and no one is looked down on.

g. **Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others:** Here the thought is completed. As we put away our selfish ambitions, our conceit, and our tendencies to be high-minded and self-absorbed, we will naturally have a greater concern for the interests and needs of others.

i. Paul doesn't tell us that it is wrong to **look out** for our own interests, but that we should not **only** look out for our own interests.

B. Jesus, the ultimate example of humility.

*Many regard Philippians 2:5-11 as a hymn of the early church that Paul incorporated into his letter. Some commentators go so far as to suggest stanza and verse arrangements for the "hymn." This is possible, but not a necessary conclusion; Paul was capable of such inspired, poetic writing himself (example: 1 Corinthians 13). For reasons which we will examine later, this passage is often known as the kenosis passage.*

1. (Phl 2:5) Paul applies the lesson before he states it.

**Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus,**

a. **Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus:** Paul will, in wonderful detail, describe for us the **mind** of Jesus in the following verses. But here, before he describes the mind of Jesus, he tells us what we must *do* with the information.

i. "Paul does not give all that is in the mind of Christ in these verses. He selects those qualities of our Lord which fit the needs of the Philippians at that moment. . . . This lack of unity among the Philippian saints became the occasion for perhaps the greatest Christological passage in the New Testament that sounds the depths of the incarnation." (Wuest)

b. **Let this mind be in you:** It is all too easy for us to read the following description of Jesus and admire it from a distance. God wants us to be awed by it, but also to see it as something

that we must enter into and imitate. **Let this mind** means that it is something that we have *choice* about.

- i. Remember also that this **mind** is something granted to us by God. [1 Corinthians 2:16](#) says that *we have the mind of Christ*. But **let this mind** shows us that it is also something we must *choose* to walk in. You have to **let** it be so.

## 2. (6a) Jesus was **in the form of God**.

**Who, being in the form of God,**

- a. **In the form of God:** This describes Jesus' pre-incarnate existence. We must remind ourselves that Jesus did not begin His existence in the manger at Bethlehem, but is eternal God.
- b. **Being:** This is from the ancient Greek verb *huparchein*, which "describes that which a man is in his very essence and which cannot be changed. It describes that part of a man which, in any circumstances, remains the same." (Barclay)
  - i. "Paul, by the use of the Greek word translated 'being,' informs his Greek readers that our Lord's possession of the divine essence did not cease to be a fact when He came to earth to assume human form. . . . *This word alone is enough to refute the claim of Modernism that our Lord emptied Himself of His Deity when He became Man.*" (Wuest)
- c. **Form:** This translates the ancient Greek word *morphe*. It "always signifies a form which truly and fully expresses the being which underlies it ... the words mean 'the being on an equality with God.'" (Expositors)
  - i. "*Morphe* is the essential form which never alters; *schema* is the outward form which changes from time to time and from circumstance to circumstance." (Barclay)
  - ii. "'God' has a form, and 'Jesus Christ' exists in this form of God." (Lenski)
  - iii. Wuest explains that the ancient Greek word translated **form** is very difficult to translate. When we use the word **form** we think of the *shape* of something; but the ancient Greek word had none of that idea. It is more the idea of a *mode* or an *essence*; it is the essential nature of God, without implying a physical shape or image. "Thus the Greek word for 'form' refers to that outward expression which a person gives of his inmost nature."

## 3. (6b) Jesus did not cling to the privileges of deity.

**Did not consider it robbery to be equal with God,**

- a. **Did not consider it robbery:** The ancient Greek in this phrase has the idea of something being grasped or clung to. Jesus did not cling to the prerogatives or privileges of deity.

i. Wuest defines the ancient Greek word translated **robbery** as, "A treasure to be clutched and retained at all hazards."

b. **To be equal with God**: It wasn't that Jesus was trying to *achieve* equality with the Father. He *had it*, and chose not to cling to it. Jesus' divine nature was not something He had to seek for or acquire, but it was His already.

i. Lightfoot wrote that it was not "a prize which must not slip from His grasp, a treasure to be clutched and retained at all hazards." Jesus was willing to let go of some of the prerogatives of deity to become a man.

#### 4. (Phl 2:7) Jesus **made Himself of no reputation**.

**But made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.**

a. **But made Himself of no reputation**: The more common (and well-known) translation of this is that *He emptied Himself*. From the ancient Greek word *emptied* (*kenosis*) came the idea that Jesus' incarnation was essentially a self-emptying.

i. We must carefully think about what Jesus *emptied* Himself of. Paul will tell us plainly in the following verses, but we must take care that we do not think that Jesus emptied Himself of His deity in any way.

ii. Some develop the *kenotic theory* of the incarnation to the point where they insist that Jesus divested Himself of many of the attributes of deity - such as omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence, and even suffered the elimination of His own divine self-consciousness. Yet Jesus did not (and *could* not) become "less God" in the incarnation. No deity was *subtracted* (though he did renounce some of the rights of deity); rather humanity was *added* to His nature.

iii. "During his humiliation, as God and equal with the Father, was no encroachment on the Divine prerogative; for, as he had an *equality of nature*, he had an *equality of rights*." (Clarke)

iv. "His condescension was free, and unconstrained with the consent of his Father ... the Son of the Highest can, at his own pleasure, show or eclipse his own glorious brightness, abate or let out his fullness, exalt or abase himself in respect of us." (Poole)

v. "Even as a king, by laying aside the tokens of his royalty, and putting on the habit of a merchant, when all the while he ceaseth not to be a king, or the highest in his own dominions." (Poole)

b. **Taking the form of a bondservant**: This describes *how* Jesus emptied Himself. Though he took **the form of a bondservant**, Jesus did not empty Himself of His deity or of any of His

attributes; or of His equality with God. He emptied Himself *into* the form of a **bondservant**, not merely the form of a man.

i. **Taking** (the ancient Greek word *labon*) does not imply an *exchange*, but an *addition*.

c. **Coming in the likeness of men**: This further describes how Jesus emptied Himself. We can think of someone who is a servant, but not in the **likeness of men**. Angels are servants, but not in the **likeness of men**. In fairy tales, Aladdin's Genie was a servant, but not in the **likeness of men**.

i. The word for **likeness** here *may* refer to merely the outward form of something. While Jesus did have the outward form of humanity, the outward form reflected His true humanity, which was added to His deity.

ii. "It was a likeness, but a real likeness, no mere phantom humanity as the Docetic Gnostics held." (Robertson)

5. (Phl 2:8) The extent of Jesus' self-emptying.

And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to *the point of death*, even the death of the cross.

a. **He humbled Himself and became obedient**: Jesus **humbled Himself** when He **became obedient**. This was something that Jesus could only experience by coming down from the throne of heaven and becoming a man. When God sits enthroned in heaven's glory, there is no one He obeys. Jesus had to leave heaven's glory and be **found in appearance as a man** in order to become **obedient**.

i. One key to Jesus' obedience on earth was the endurance of suffering. This again was something He could only learn by experience after the incarnation. As it is written: *though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered.* (Hebrews 5:8)

ii. Indeed, **He humbled Himself**.

- He was humble in that he took the form of a man, and not a more glorious creature like an angel.
- He was humble in that He was born into an obscure, oppressed place.
- He was humble in that He was born into poverty, among a despised people.
- He was humble in that He was born as a child instead of appearing as a man.
- He was humble in submitting to the obedience of a child in a household.
- He was humble in learning and practicing a trade - and a humble trade of a builder.

- He was humble in the long wait until He launched out into public ministry.
- He was humble in the companions and disciples He chose.
- He was humble in the audience He appealed to and the way He taught.
- He was humble in the temptations He allowed and endured.
- He was humble in the weakness, hunger, thirst, and tiredness He endured.
- He was humble in His total obedience to His Heavenly Father.
- He was humble in His submission to the Holy Spirit.
- He was humble in choosing and submitting to the death of the cross.
- He was humble in the agony of His death.
- He was humble in the shame, mocking, and public humiliation of His death.
- He was humble in enduring the spiritual agony of His sacrifice on the cross.

iii. We can imagine that it was possible for the Son of God to become man and pay for the sins of the world without this great humiliation. He might have added the humanity of a 33-year old man to his deity. He might have appeared before man only in His transfigured glory, and taught men what they needed to hear from Him. He might have suffered for the sins of man in a hidden place of the earth far from the eyes of man, or on the dark side of the moon for that matter. Yet He did not; **He humbled Himself**, and did it for the surpassing greatness of our salvation and His work for us.

b. **To the point of death, even the death of the cross:** This states the extent of Jesus' humility and obedience.

i. Crucifixion was such a shameful death that it was not permitted for Roman citizens (such as the people of Philippi). A victim of crucifixion was considered by the Jews to be particularly cursed by God ([Deuteronomy 21:23](#) and [Galatians 3:13](#)).

ii. Robertson called the **death of the cross** "The bottom rung in the ladder from the Throne of God. Jesus came all the way down to the most despised death of all, a condemned criminal on the accursed cross."

iii. **Even the death of the cross** shows that there is no limit to what God will do to demonstrate His love and saving power to man; this was and forever will be the ultimate. "What must sin have been in the sight of God, when it required such abasement in Jesus Christ to make an atonement for it, and *undo* its influence and malignity!" (Clarke)

iv. "The lower he stoops to save us, the higher we ought to lift him in our adoring reverence. Blessed be his name, he stoops, and stoops, and stoops, and, when he reaches our level, and becomes man, he still stoops, and stoops, and stoops lower and deeper yet." (Spurgeon)

c. **Even the death of the cross:** All of this was a great display of the power of Jesus. Remember that because of Paul's past experience among the Philippians, they were tempted to think of God's *power* as being expressed only in exaltation and deliverance and not in terms of glorifying God through humble service and endurance.

i. In this, Paul reminded the Philippians that his current place of humble circumstances (his Roman imprisonment) could still show forth the glory and power of God, even as Jesus did in His humility.

C. Jesus, the ultimate example of exaltation after humility.

1. (Phl 2:9) The exaltation of Jesus Christ.

Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name,

a. **Therefore God has also highly exalted Him:** This is the general heading for the material in the next three verses. These words describe how God has exalted Jesus. Indeed, **highly exalted** could also be translated "super exalted."

i. "The Greek elegancy imports superexalted, or exalted with all exaltation." (Poole)

ii. "Now, just pause over this thought - that Christ did not crown himself, but that his Father crowned him; that he did not elevate himself to the throne of majesty, but that his Father lifted him there, and placed him on his throne." (Spurgeon)

b. **Given Him the name which above every name:** This not only gives Jesus the Divine name Yahweh, but also implies that God has declared that Jesus has the *character* and *person* above all others, when we consider the importance of the Hebrew concept of **the name**.

i. This verse, with its clear statement of Jesus' deity, is powerful ammunition against those who deny the deity of Jesus Christ. There is no higher name than Yahweh, and Jesus has that **name**.

2. (Phl 2:10-11) The subjection of the whole creation to Jesus.

That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

a. **That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow:** Not only is Jesus exalted by the Father, but the whole world is brought into submission to the Son.

i. "Paul does not imply by this a universal salvation, but means that every personal being will ultimately confess Christ's lordship, either with joyful faith or with resentment and despair." (Kent)

b. **Those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth:** This conveys the absolute totality of all creation recognizing the superiority of Jesus Christ.

i. In this, Paul draws on the idea of [Isaiah 45:23](#): *I have sworn by Myself; the word has gone out of My mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, that to Me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall take an oath.* Notice that in Isaiah, it is to Yahweh that all knees bow and tongues confess. In Philippians it is to Jesus, showing that Jesus *is* Yahweh.

ii. **Those under the earth:** "Either the dead, who are hid in the earth, and shall be raised by the power of Christ ... or, devils, and wicked souls." (Poole)

c. **Every knee should bow ... every tongue should confess:** The combination of **tongues confessing** and **knees bowing** gives evidence that the idea is a complete submission to Jesus, both in word and in action, and one that is required of all.

i. The totality of this recognition of Jesus' deity and exaltation has caused many to envision this happening in formal way after the final judgment, when every creature, in heaven and hell, is required to bow their knees and make the confession **that Jesus Christ is Lord.**

d. **That Jesus Christ is Lord:** From this we can say that there is a sense in which Jesus returned to heaven with more than He had when He left. Not only did He return with His humanity still added to his deity (although a resurrected humanity), He also returned with the recognition planted among men of who He was and the worship He deserved - something unknown until the Incarnation and the full revelation of His person and work.

i. "He has always (in Paul's view) shared in the Divine nature. But it is only as the result of His Incarnation, Atonement, Resurrection and Exaltation that He *appears to men* as on an equality with God, that He is *worshipped by them* in the way in which Jehovah is worshipped." (Expositors)

ii. "He might have used the miraculous powers inherent in His Divine nature in such a way as to compel men, without further ado, to worship Him as God. Instead of that He was willing to attain this high dignity by the path of humiliation, suffering and death." (Expositors)

iii. All this must be seen in reference to the humiliation described in [Philippians 2:6-8](#); our tendency is to long for the exaltation, but to forsake the humiliation.

e. **Jesus Christ is Lord:** The confession of Jesus Christ as **Lord** reminds us to consider the great significance of this word *kurios*, especially as it was be understood by the early church, who used the LXX as their Bible - where *kurios* was consistently used to translate the tetragrammaton, standing for the name *Yahweh*.

i. We also should not miss the significance that at a later time in the Roman Empire, all residents of the Empire were required to swear an oath of allegiance to the Emperor, declaring that *Caesar is Lord*, and burning a pinch of incense to an image of the emperor. Though the Roman state saw this only as a display of political allegiance, Christians rightly interpreted it as idolatry - and refused to participate, often paying with their lives.

ii. Paul has no doubt who is really Lord - not the Caesar whom he will stand trial before; *Caesar* may be a high name, but it is not the name above all names, the name which belongs to Jesus Christ!

f. **Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father:** Remember that Paul did not give this description of Jesus in [Philippians 2:5-11](#) simply for the theological education of the Philippians.

- He gave it to equip them to endure the hardship they were experienced.
- He gave it help them to understand Paul's hardships.
- He gave it to help them to practice real Christian unity in the midst of hard times.

i. This picture of Jesus has helped them to understand how to assess the ministry of Paul, which seemed weak at the present time.

ii. This picture helped them to understand the context of God's revelation of power - how God delights to show His power through humble actions.

iii. This picture has equipped them to act in a way towards each other that will promote unity in the body of Christ.

iv. This picture has shown them how to follow Jesus' pattern of patient, humble obedience - something Paul will call them to continue in the following verses.

D. Paul's exhortation to the Philippians.

1. ([Phi 2:12](#)) Working out your own salvation.

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling;

- a. **Therefore ... as you have always obeyed:** We should not miss the connection between the obedience *Jesus showed* (Philippians 2:8) and the obedience *Paul expected* of Christians as followers of Jesus (Philippians 2:12).
- b. **Work out your own salvation:** We know that Paul did *not* mean "work so as to earn your own salvation." Such a statement would contradict the whole of Paul's gospel. What Paul *did* mean is to call the Philippians to put forth real effort into their Christians lives. This is not to **work** their salvation in the sense of accomplishing it, but to **work out** their salvation - to see it evident in every area of their lives, to *activate* this salvation God freely gave them.
- i. Therefore, "These words, as they stand in the New Testament, contain no exhortation to all men, but are directed to the people of God. They are not intended as an exhortation to the unconverted; they are, as we find them in the epistle, beyond all question addressed to those who are already saved through a living faith in the Lord Jesus Christ." (Spurgeon)
- c. **Work out your own salvation:** There is a sense in which our salvation is complete, in the sense that Jesus has done a complete work *for* us. Still there is also a sense in which our salvation is incomplete, in that it is not yet a complete work *in* us.
- i. "The believer must finish, must carry to conclusion, must apply to its fullest consequences what is already given by God in principle ... He must *work out* what God in His grace has *worked in*." (Muller)
- ii. "Some professors appear to have imbibed the notion that the grace of God is a kind of opium with which men may drug themselves into slumber, and their passion for strong doses of sleepy doctrine grows with that which it feeds on. "God works in us," say they, "therefore there is nothing for us to do." Bad reasoning, false conclusion. God works, says the text; therefore we must work out because God works in." (Spurgeon)
- iii. "He exhorts as if he were an Arminian in addressing men. He prays as if he were a Calvinist in addressing God and feels no inconsistency in the two attitudes. Paul makes no attempt to reconcile divine sovereignty and human free agency, but boldly proclaims both." (Robertson)
- d. **Your own salvation:** This tells us to give attention to our **own salvation**. Sometimes we show great concern for the work of God in others, and not enough for His work in us. We should care about the souls of others, but this care must begin with our own soul.
- e. **With fear and trembling:** Paul's idea was not that we should live our Christian lives with a constant sense of fear and terror, but that we should live with a fear of failing to **work out your own salvation**.

- i. We work out our salvation with **fear and trembling**; but it doesn't have to be the fear of hell or damnation. It may instead be the righteous and awe-filled reverence of God every

believer should have. It doesn't have to be the **trembling** of a guilty sinner; it should instead be the joyful **trembling** of an encounter with the glory of God.

f. **Now much more in my absence**: In context, Paul asked for this Christian **work** ethic (not a *works* ethic) to be promoted all the more because of his **absence**.

## 2. (Phl 2:13) God's work in you.

For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for *His* good pleasure.

a. **For it is God who works in you**: Paul here gave the reason *why* Christians must *work out their salvation with fear and trembling* - because **God** is working in them.

i. We take comfort in it: **God who works in you**. "Grace all-sufficient dwells in you, believer. There is a living well within you springing up; use the bucket, then; keep on drawing; you will never exhaust it; there is a living source within." (Spurgeon)

b. **God ... works in you**: The idea is that since God has done and is doing a work in the Christian, the Christian therefore has a greater responsibility to work diligently with fear and trembling regarding their own salvation and walk with the Lord. God's work in us *increases* our responsibility; it doesn't *lessen* it in any way.

i. Those that take God's sovereignty and working and use them as an excuse for inaction and lethargy are like the wicked and lazy servant of [Matthew 25:24-30](#).

ii. Those that are really God's servants use their understanding of His sovereignty and omnipotence as a motivation for greater, more dedicated service to Him.

c. **Both to will and to do**: God's work in us extends to the transformation of our **will**, as well as changing our actions (**to do**). Yet in light of the original exhortation to *work out your own salvation*, this is not a passive transaction.

d. **For His good pleasure**: This is the motive behind God's work in our life. He does so because it gives Him **pleasure** to do it.

## 3. (Phl 2:14-16) Practical ways to obey Paul's exhortation.

Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain.

a. **Do all things without complaining and disputing**: There is a good deal of dispute among commentators as to if this **complaining and disputing** refers to problems among the Philippians (such as mentioned in [Philippians 2:1-4](#)) or if this refers to their attitude towards God. Perhaps they resented God because of their present conflict ([Philippians 1:27-30](#)).

i. Because Paul specifically used terms that were used to describe Israel's complaining towards God during the Exodus, it is probably best to see the **complaining and disputing** as including their attitude towards God. Spurgeon gives three examples of things we must not murmur against:

- The Providence of God
- One another
- The ungodly world

ii. In this command, the emphasis falls on the words **all things**, which is actually the first word of the verse in the ancient Greek text.

iii. "Dispute not with God; let him do what seemeth him good. Dispute not with your fellow Christians, raise not railing accusations against them. When Calvin was told that Luther had spoken ill of him, he said, 'Let Luther call me devil if he please, I will never say of him but that he is a most dear and valiant servant of the Lord.' Raise not intricate and knotty points by way of controversy." (Spurgeon)

**b. That you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault:**

Through the display of a non-complaining spirit, we show ourselves to be true followers of God.

i. **Harmless** can have the thought of "pure" or "unalloyed." But the translation as *harmless* is also justified (it is the same word used in [Matthew 10:16](#)).

ii. "'Be ye blameless *and harmless*,' says the apostle. The Greek word might be translated 'hornless,' as if ye were to be creatures not only that do no harm, but *could not do any*; like sheep that not only *will not* devour, but *cannot* devour, for it were contrary to their nature; for they have no teeth with which to bite, no fangs with which to sting, no poison with which to slay." (Spurgeon)

c. **In the midst of a crooked and perverse generation:** This seems to refer back to [Deuteronomy 32:5](#): *They have corrupted themselves; they are not His children, because of their blemish: A perverse and crooked generation.* Paul meant that modern Christians should not be like rebellious Israel, who were constantly **complaining and disputing** with God during the wilderness sojourn.

d. **Among whom you shine as lights in the world:** This is not an encouragement to do something; it is a simple statement of fact. Christians *are lights in the world*; the only question is, "How brightly do they shine?"

i. "Not *lights* merely, but **luminaries**, *heavenly bodies*. But this can hardly be satisfactorily given in an English version." (Alford)

ii. We are to fulfill our place **as lights in the world:**

- Lights are used to make things evident.
- Lights are used to guide.
- Lights are used as a warning.
- Lights are used to bring cheer.
- Lights are used to make things safe.

iii. Paul knew that the lights were in a bad place. Instead of excusing the lights for not shining, Paul knew that their position made it all the more important that they shine. Being in a dark place is a greater incentive to shine.

e. **Holding fast the word of life:** The phrase **holding fast** could also be translated *holding forth*. Both meanings are true and Paul could have meant it in this dual sense. We *hold fast* - in the sense of holding strong - **the word of life**, and we also *hold forth* **the word of life**.

i. "It is not so much the conduct of the Philippians that justifies the assertion that they shine as luminaries, it is their *having life's Word*. This Word makes them luminaries irrespective of what the world judges about it and about those who have it." (Lenski)

f. **So that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain:** The idea that Paul's work might somehow end up to be in vain was a troublesome thought to him. He knew that his work really abided in *people*, so that if those people did not continue on strong with the Lord, there was a sense in which his own ministry was **in vain**.

g. **In the day of Christ:** Paul looked forward to **the day of Christ**, and on that day he wanted to see and to know that his work was fruitful. This was something he could only be assured of if the Philippians continued to walk with the Lord.

i. This is the true heart of a shepherd: to have few burdens for one's self, but many for others; to not be content with one's own relationship with God, but also longing to see others walking with the Lord.

4. (Phl 2:17-18) Paul as an example of his own exhortation.

Yes, and if I am being poured out *as a drink offering* on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. For the same reason you also be glad and rejoice with me.

a. **Poured out as a drink offering:** Paul here alluded to a practice among both Jews and pagans in their sacrifices. They often poured out wine (or sometimes perfume) either beside (as in the Jewish practice) or upon (as in the pagan practice) an animal that was sacrificed to God or pagan gods.

i. This is the **drink offering**, which accompanied another sacrifice, that is mentioned in [Numbers 15:4-5](#) and [28:7](#).

ii. The grammar of **I am being poured out** is in the *present* tense. With this Paul indicated the possibility that his execution may be immanent.

b. **On the sacrifice and service of your faith**: The ancient Greek word translated **service** is *leiturgia*. It meant, "Service to God or His cause ... any priestly action or sacred performance." (Muller) Therefore in this verse we have a *sacrifice*, a *priest*, and an *accompanying libation* that makes the sacrifice even more precious.

i. Since **the sacrifice and service** were connected with the **faith** of the Philippians, it is best to see Paul's picture describing them as the "priests" and their faith as the "sacrifice," to which Paul added (and thereby enriched) his martyrdom as a drink offering.

c. **I am glad and rejoice ... you also be glad and rejoice with me**: Paul looked forward to what might be his imminent martyrdom, and expected the Philippians to **be glad and rejoice with** him. Paul wasn't being morbid here, asking the Philippians to take joy in something as depressing as his death. Yet he did ask the Philippians to see his death as something that would bring glory to God. This is a theme repeated from [Philippians 1:20](#).

i. Paul's life was going to be a sacrifice for Jesus Christ, either in life or in death. This was a source of gladness and joy for Paul, and he wants the Philippians to adopt the same attitude.

ii. Again, we come to the consistent theme of Philippians: *joy*. But this is joy based not on circumstances (quite the opposite, really), but based in the fact of a life totally committed to Jesus Christ.

#### E. Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus.

1. ([Phi 2:19-22](#)) Paul writes about Timothy and his soon anticipated visit.

But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, that I also may be encouraged when I know your state. For I have no one like-minded, who will sincerely care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus. But you know his proven character, that as a son with *his* father he served with me in the gospel.

a. **But I trust in the Lord**: This showed Paul's heart of true reliance upon the Lord. He wanted to see Timothy among the Philippians, but recognized that it would happen God's way and in God's timing.

b. **That I also may be encouraged when I know your state**: Paul didn't expect problems from the Philippians, as if they were one of his problem churches. Instead, he expected that

he would be **encouraged when I know your state**.

i. Contrast this with the attitude Paul conveyed to the Corinthian church in [2 Corinthians 13:2-3](#). The Corinthian church had much worse problems than the Philippian church had.

c. **Who will sincerely care for your state**: When Paul sent Timothy he sent his best, a man who showed a pastor's heart and had greater concern for his sheep than for himself.

i. Paul recognized just how rare this kind of heart was when he observed **all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus**.

2. ([Phl 2:23-24](#)) Paul repeats his desire to come to the Philippians in person, not only to send Timothy to them.

**Therefore I hope to send him at once, as soon as I see how it goes with me. But I trust in the Lord that I myself shall also come shortly.**

a. **I trust in the Lord that I myself shall also come shortly**: Perhaps Paul was being careful to avoid the accusation, "Paul wants to send Timothy because he really doesn't want to be here himself." He clearly told the Philippians that he also wanted to come.

3. ([Phl 2:25-26](#)) Paul writes about Epaphroditus and his coming to the Philippians.

**Yet I considered it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier, but your messenger and the one who ministered to my need; since he was longing for you all, and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick.**

a. **I considered it necessary to send to you**: This undoubtedly meant that Epaphroditus took this letter to the Philippians. It seems that **Epaphroditus** came to Paul from the Philippians as a messenger, and he became sick while he was with Paul.

b. **My brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier**: Paul gave these important titles to Epaphroditus. He was a man Paul valued as a partner in the work of ministry.

i. There are three special relationships here mentioned:

- **Brother** speaks of a relationship to be enjoyed.
- **Worker** speaks of a job to be done.
- **Soldier** speaks of a battle to be fought.

c. **Your messenger and the one who ministered to my need**: This means that Epaphroditus brought a gift of financial support from the Philippians to Paul ([Philippians 4:18](#)).

i. **Ministered** has in it the idea of a priestly service. When Epaphroditus brought the support money from the Philippians to Paul in Rome, he brought a *sacrifice*.

d. **Because you heard that he was sick**: Epaphroditus was concerned because the Philippians learned of his sickness and worried about him. The return of Epaphroditus would give them peace of mind that their valued brother was in good condition.

i. It would also help Epaphroditus because **he was longing for you all and was distressed**. He greatly longed to see the Philippian Christians.

#### 4. (Phl 2:27) Epaphroditus' sickness and his recovery.

For indeed he was sick almost unto death; but God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow.

a. **For indeed he was sick almost unto death**: The sickness of Epaphroditus was no small thing; it was **almost unto death**. Yet **God had mercy on him** and he recovered.

i. There is nothing in the text to indicate that this was a miraculous healing, but Paul still saw God's hand of mercy in his recovery.

b. **Lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow**: God's mercy to Epaphroditus was also mercy to Paul. If Epaphroditus had died, Paul would have had **sorrow upon sorrow**, not only because a valued brother, worker, and soldier for Christ was no longer on this earth. He would also have **sorrow upon sorrow** because it all happened when Epaphroditus came on behalf of the Philippians to minister to Paul's material and spiritual needs while Paul was in prison in Rome.

#### 5. (Phl 2:28-30) Paul's instructions to the Philippians on how to receive Epaphroditus as he returns to them.

Therefore I sent him the more eagerly, that when you see him again you may rejoice, and I may be less sorrowful. Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness, and hold such men in esteem; because for the work of Christ he came close to death, not regarding his life, to supply what was lacking in your service toward me.

a. **I sent him the more eagerly**: Paul was eager to re-unite the Philippians with their beloved brother Epaphroditus, and reminded the Philippians to give him proper recognition when he returned (**hold such men in esteem**).

i. Probably, the Philippians sent Epaphroditus not only as a messenger, but also to be a personal attendant to Paul on behalf of the Philippians. When illness prevented Epaphroditus from doing this, he may have seemed like a failure (perhaps even a malingerer) in the eyes of the Philippians. Paul assured them this was not the case; in fact, it was just the opposite - Epaphroditus served above and beyond the call of duty.

b. **Because for the work of Christ he came close to death:** It was **for the work of Christ** that Epaphroditus came **close to death**. Even though his **work** was mostly that of being a messenger and not anything particularly spiritual, it was still **the work of Christ**.

c. **Not regarding his life:** The willingness to put the **work of Christ** first and his own personal safety and concern second displayed the noble heart of Epaphroditus.

i. The ancient Greek phrase **not regarding his life** uses a gambler's word that meant to risk everything on the roll of the dice. Paul wrote that for the sake of Jesus Christ, Epaphroditus was willing to gamble everything.

ii. In the days of the Early Church there was an association of men and women who called themselves *the gamblers*, taken from this same ancient Greek word. It was their aim to visit the prisoners and the sick, especially those who were ill with dangerous and infectious diseases. Often, when plague struck a city the heathen threw the dead bodies into the streets and fled in terror. But the *gamblers* buried the dead and helped the sick the best they could, and so risked their lives to show the love of Jesus.

iii. "It seems plain from this expression that Epaphroditus' illness was the consequence not of persecution but of over-exertion." (Lightfoot)

d. **To supply what was lacking in your service toward me:** Epaphroditus did this by actually *bringing* the support that the Philippians gave. There was a *lack* in all the Philippians' generosity and good intentions until the gift finally made its way to Paul's need.

i. We should have the heart that there is something **lacking** in our **service** until the job is done. We should not be satisfied with good intentions or a half-done job.

© 2006 David Guzik - No distribution beyond personal use without permission